

Utah Mormon English

Utah Mormon English refers to American English, primarily used by members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS Church) in Utah,^[1] showing an abundance of linguistically possible features without any overall consistency of these features. Ample small-scale research has been conducted on English in Utah, showing several possible variants common especially among LDS Church members; however, any variant by itself is still used by only a minority of the total speakers.^[2] Therefore, Utah Mormon English is too inconsistent to classify as either a sub-dialect of Western American English (the dialect typical of Utah speakers unaffiliated with the LDS Church) or a separate dialect of its own.^{[2][3][4][5]}

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History

Utah is the only U.S. state with a majority population belonging to a single religious denomination. Mormon pioneers first arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1847, eventually settling the Utah Territory. Many of these settlers came from New York, Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois, where the LDS Church had been based previously,^[6] plus from foreign nations, notably including English-speaking immigrants from United Kingdom and Canada, persuaded to Utah as a result of Latter-day Saint missionary work.^[7] These already-native English varieties thus adapted to the English of the Utah Mormon community,^[6] with Mormon English differences further supported by Latter-day Saints' geographic and social isolation from neighboring communities.^{[8][7]} More recently, an influx of Californians to Utah is affecting speech patterns in Salt Lake and elsewhere along the Wasatch Front.^[9] One historical example of Utah Mormons seeking to consciously separate themselves from others linguistically was with Brigham Young's failed Deseret alphabet.^[7]

Grammar

Utah Mormon English

Region

Utah

Language family

Indo-European

Germanic

West Germanic

Ingvaemonic

Anglo-Frisian

Anglic

English

American English

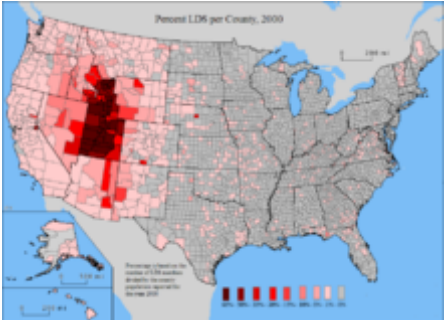
Utah Mormon English

Language codes

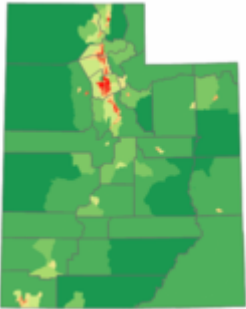
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Percent LDS per County, 2000



High concentration of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in and around Utah



Population density of Utah (the Wasatch Front in red).

A grammatical feature that seems to have been influenced by, and primarily exists among, members of the church, is the use of the pro-predicate "do" or "done", as in the sentence "I would have done",^[7] particularly among middle-aged or older female speakers.^[10] This feature is shared with British English and was likely introduced by the influx of English immigrants beginning in 1850 and persisted because of strong, continued English lineage in Utah.^[7]

Phonology

No unique phonetic features of English in Utah have been found,^[11] though a well-studied convergence of phonetic possibilities exists. Utah English speakers have been noted, like scatterings of Western U.S. English speakers in general,^[12] to lax the tense front vowels before /l/, which results in mergers or near-mergers, thus pronouncing "sale" as *sell* /sɛl/ or "milk" as *melk* /mɛlk/.^{[3][13][3]} The Western articulation of /ʊ/, which occurs closer to the front of the mouth, is more pronounced than in the West in general among younger, female Utah speakers.^[4] Utahns may use slightly distinct vowel placement and vowel space area during articulation, particularly with young, female speakers documented as pronouncing /æ/ as higher than /ɑ/—the opposite of a typical modern Western accent.^[4] The use of a full rather than syllabic pronunciation of /ən/ in the sequence /-tən/, in words like "kitten" or "mountain", is a minor but noted variant among younger, female Utah speakers;^[4] thus, *kitten* as [ˈkʰɪʔən] in addition to more General American [ˈkʰɪʔŋ]. However, this feature has been reported elsewhere in the country too, including California and New Jersey.^[11]

Declining characteristics

A distinguishing feature is the cord-card merger, though in decline as usually only found among older Utah speakers,^[2] merging the /ɑr/ and /ɔr/ sounds to a greater extent than other Western speakers.^{[4][13]} A characteristic Utah English shares with Midland and Southwestern U.S. English is occasional monophthongization of the /aɪ/ sound,^[5] possibly influenced by settlers from the South and younger settlers who would have acquired the feature in Missouri during their linguistically formative years.^[5] This monophthongization increased in recordings of Utah religious orators born across the second half of the 19th century, before decreasing among speakers since, though a slight increase exists again among informants born between the mid-1970s to mid-1980s.^[5]

Demographic findings

Among social factors, age is the most influential in discrepancies between Utah speakers.^[14] Gender and population areas also are a significant factor, with small population areas being more likely to produce the stereotypical phonetic and lexical differences from other Western U.S. English.^[3] Generally, Utah has been stigmatized as being rural and backward, and that stigmatization of the culture carries over to the dialect, even though many Utah characteristics are also present in other American dialects.^[15]

According to The Utah Dialect Project's website, begun in the early 2000s with the purpose of providing "the first overview of spoken Utah English",^{[2][14]} central Utah (below the Wasatch Front) is the most likely to use marked features, though only slightly more so than southern Utah; on the whole, however, these features still remain minority ones throughout Utah, a majority of whose residents otherwise speak the general Western U.S. dialect.^{[3][14]}

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